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MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

For whatever it may be worth, I would like to pass along a few observations on a situation in which I had some part in 1936 - 1939 which may have some resemblance to a situation which is developing currently.

In 1936-37-38, a number of Americans (of whom I was one), were allowed to see, first hand, a considerable part of the German air re-armament program. As Editor of "Aviation" Magazine of McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, I made two trips to Germany, - the first in November 1936 and the second in November 1938. On these occasions, under the auspices of the Air Ministry and the DVL, I was shown through a number of German airplane and engine factories and also some of the alleged "latest" work in aeronautical research laboratories. These visits were rather widely reported in the American aeronautical and popular press. (See "Aviation" -magazine issues of December 1936; Jan-Feb 1937; also issues of Nov-Dec, 1938; Jan-Feb 1939; Saturday Evening Post, 19 Feb 1939, "Hitler Wasn't Bluffing"; Christian Science Monitor, Readers Digest and a number of newspapers and magazines of the period. On my return in both instances, I was intensively "de-briefed" by the top-side officers of the Bureau of Aeronautics, the (then) Air Corps and the NACA. Many others, - of which the most famous was Charles Lindbergh, were also shown the same things and also reported them widely.

There was wide speculation at the time as to why the Germans were showing their wares so obviously. The commonest assumption was that

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they were so far ahead of the rest of the world that they were in a position to boast of it openly - "to lead from strength".

Recent events have convinced me that such was not the primary reason. These disclosures now appear to have been an "Operation Red Herring", to cover the really important research and development that was then going on in the field of jet engines and guided missiles.

From the papers and the discussions that were presented in the recent ACARD Symposium on Guided Missiles in Munich and if such recently released books as Dornberger's "V-2", etc., it is amply clear to the intelligence community that great progress was being made in many of these areas during the same period, 1936 - 1939.

I shall not belabor the point. Your research departments can easily turn up chapter and verse if necessary.

Those of us who were shown only the developments in conventional aircraft came back to spread the word in the hope, (I now think), of diverting our main counter-effort into conventional aircraft channels. We, the U.S., were slow in getting around to it, but that is just what happened. Fortunately, the German jet and guided missile programs bogged down, partly due to their own stupidity, and eventually won the air war by simply overwhelming them by a vast production of those same conventional planes and engines, - but for a while it was touch-and-go. The margin was a narrow one. Had the Me-162 and 163's, (and even the V-1's and V-2's) become operational six months earlier, we might have had a very rough time of it, - and largely because of the "Red Herring" tactic, we had no counter-weapons at all, in sight - or even in mind! (Perhaps not quite literally) -

but certainly none were even approaching operational status by the end of the war.

Now, the point I want to make is this -

Can it be that a parallel situation is developing today re: Soviet air development? Isn't it possible that the new attitude of the Russians - jet transports in London, and "come see our air show", is a diversionary tactic designed to lead us down the wrong road in our research and development planning? It seems to me quite possible that they are temperamentally and scientifically capable of taking some long and radically new step forward behind the screen of alleged "disclosures" in the more or less conventional areas.

This certainly cannot be a new or original idea, but the possible parallelism with the nearly-successful German tactic of the late 1930's seemed to me to be worthy of mention.

(Signed)

S. Paul Johnston